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AUTHOR	Shanahan, Timothy; And Others
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ABSTRACT

Research studies and theoretical works on the following aspects of professionalization of adult literacy teachers were reviewed: preparation, certification, and licensure of adult educators; history of the professionalization process of other occupations; state certification requirements for adult basic education (ABE) teachers; and preparation standards for literacy educators. It was concluded that the long-standing debate over professionalization of literacy teachers cannot be resolved unless all sides examine the assumptions underlying their positions regarding issues such as the following: adults' rights to education; the state's responsibility for educating adults; the role of teachers in educational quality; and the effectiveness of teacher training. It was further concluded that states with teacher preparation requirements contribute a much greater share of their total ABE allocation to teacher preparation than do states with no such requirements. Among the recommendations were the following: policy forums involving federal and state policymakers, researchers, and practitioners should be held to open debate about the effectiveness of various approaches to certification/licensure in the field of adult literacy; federal support should be provided for empirical research on the effectiveness of teacher training in adult literacy instruction; and adult literacy teachers should take a proactive role in professionalization debates. (MN)

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BRIEF

The Professionalization of the Adult Literacy Teacher

Timothy Shanahan
Maureen Meehan
Stephen Mogge
University of Illinois at Chicago

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KEY FINDINGS:

- The long-standing debate over the professionalization of adult literacy teachers cannot move toward resolution unless all sides examine the assumptions underlying their positions.
- Frequently unstated and generally unexamined premises concerning adult basic education include (a) the rights of adults to education, (b) the state responsibility for the education of adults, (c) the role of teachers in educational quality, (d) the effectiveness of teacher training, and (e) the existence of a body of knowledge relevant to adult literacy education.
- States with teacher preparation requirements contribute a much greater share of their total adult basic education allocation to teacher preparation than do states that have no such requirements, which suggests that the professionalization of teachers is part of a comprehensive commitment to adult literacy education in these states.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS:

- A series of policy forums involving federal and state policymakers as well as researchers and practitioners needs to be established to ensure serious, open debate about the effectiveness of various approaches to certification and licensure in the field of adult literacy.
- Federal support should be provided for empirical research examining the effectiveness of teacher training in adult literacy instruction.
- Adult literacy teachers need to take a proactive role in the professionalization debates, attempting to resolve the arguments and promote more productive discussions concerning specific knowledge and skills requirements.

INTRODUCTION

Issues of teacher quality are hotly debated topics within the adult literacy community, and the rules and regulations for governing who can be a teacher are being rethought and revised in many states. This report identifies and analyzes issues pertinent to the debate about professionalization within adult literacy education by unpacking the usually unexamined premises upon which previous arguments have been based.

METHODOLOGY

The report reviews relevant research and theory on professionalization including the preparation, certification, and licensure of adult educators. It also includes an examination of the history of the professionalization process of other occupations, a secondary analysis of state certification requirements for ABE teachers, interviews with state officials, and information gathered from interviews and focus groups discussions with adult literacy teachers and program administrators in the Chicago area about preparation standards for adult literacy educators.

IMPLICATIONS

A major contribution of this report is the identification of the subtle, often unspoken impediments to productive discussion about professionalizing the adult literacy teaching force. With these impediments brought to the forefront, the professionalization debate can focus on them first, and then discussion can move forward to timely solutions to the problem. Policymakers, practitioners, and researchers alike can benefit from

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the resulting increased clarity of the issues in professionalization and adult literacy instruction.

FURTHER READING

Carlson, R. A. (1977). Professionalization of adult education: An historical-philosophical analysis. *Adult Education, 28,* 53-61.

Foster, S. E. (1988). *Professionalization of the adult literacy workforce*. Connecticut: Southport Institution for Policy Analysis. (Eric Document Reproduction Service No. 302 680)

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